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Presence in Double Vision

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Cover Page Footnote

1 Funding for this study group and research process was provided by the Faculty Research Award Program Grant, University at Albany, SUNY 2 For a detailed explanation of the Descriptive Review process see Himley & Carini (2000) and Himley (2002).

Presence in Double Vision

by Miriam Raider-Roth

> *In acknowledging our participating in and contribution to the direction of growth, what we also accept is our responsibility to be vitally present in the moment of teaching as well as being conscious of the consequences of our actions, which cannot be left to chance or be mechanical or routine. (Cuffaro, 1995, p. 31).*

Early childhood offers us the opportunity to view humanity in its rawest form – the joys, sorrows, desires are expressed through words, body, play, and creative expression. Cuffaro (1995) teaches us that in early childhood classrooms, we begin to learn to live in community, practice democratic living, and experience, enact and build essential understandings of the social world. In early childhood classrooms where play is encouraged, facilitated, and observed, the essential tensions of our culture are played out. These spaces offer perceptive observers an opportunity to understand how gender identity, development, and relationship shape teaching and learning (Chu, 2014; Katch, 2002; Paley, 1986). The inquiry described in this article stems from the observations of an astute, wise, kindergarten teacher named Eric, who was dedicated to being "vitally present" in relationship to his students and whose capacity for presence was challenged by a young boy named TJ.

To set the stage for this inquiry, how I came to know Eric and follow his story, I begin with the questions that led me to him. Rooted in a relational/cultural psychological orientation (Gilligan, 2003; Miller & Stiver, 1997), my earliest research with elementary school-aged children found that children perceived robust trustworthy knowledge to be predicated on strong trustworthy classroom relationships, especially relationships between teachers and students (Raider-Roth, 2005). Building on this finding, I began to think about the relational world of boys in schools because of what appeared to be an inherent paradox faced by boys.

In the last decade, psychological research has demonstrated that early childhood is a tumultuous and vulnerable time for boys, as they experience profound cultural pressure to separate from nurturing relationships (Chu, 2014; Dooley & Fidele, 2004; Gilligan, 2003; Way, 2011). Such separation is above and beyond the individuation that is part of healthy development at this age, and is, rather, an accommodation to the norms of masculinity, which "often implies a willingness on the part of boys to stand alone and forgo relationships" (Gilligan, 2003, p.16). In contrast, research has found that girls are at higher psychological risk later in development. As they approach adolescence, they face intensive cultural pressures to be a "good girl" – including a relational paradox of forgoing an authentic sense of self to maintain relationships with others (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 2011; Tolman, 2005).

If trustworthy relationships are the cornerstone of learning, what happens for early childhood boys who face the cultural pressures of masculinity, and thus may move away from relationships? If humans need relationships they can connect with and build upon in order to learn, but some boys feel pressure to separate from others, what happens to their learning in schools? I became interested in this paradox and teachers' relational dynamics with the boys in their classrooms.

I examined this question with a group of teachers from Pre-K to high school in an ongoing study group. When faced with direct resistance from boys in the classroom – boys who challenged them personally, challenged the teacher's power and authority, or challenged classroom routines – these teachers often experienced an intense questioning of their own competence and pedagogical values. In order to reduce the corrosive effect of such questioning, the teachers in our study group reported stepping back or "letting go" of their relationships with the boys. They knew that this relinquishing of relationship might compromise the boys' learning, thereby compromising their efficacy as a teachers – the very aspect of their teaching identity they were trying to protect (Raider-Roth, Albert, Bircann-Barkey, Gidseg & Murray, 2008). Yet, if teachers engaged with the boys' resistance and stayed in the relationship, they often suffered under the resulting corrosive self-questioning (Raider-Roth, Albert, Bircann-Barkey, Gidseg & Murray, 2012). How then do teachers emerge from this paradox in a way that allows them to maintain their integrity as teachers, hold on to their sense of self as competent and true to their values, and, at the same time, maintain a relationship with boys that supports their learning? Essentially, how do teachers become and remain present to the boys in their classrooms?

The following portrait introduces one teacher, Eric, and presents his journey through this paradox. His honest self-interrogation of his emotions, pedagogical values, gender identity, and relational stance assisted him in constructing a path through what felt like a quagmire. He teaches us that his primary relationships with self and colleagues were central in his capacity to be present to one young boy. He teaches us that presence to his students requires presence to self and presence to forces of culture, such as gender – a presence in double vision. His journey offers a possible road-map through the complex relational and cultural terrain of presence.

Theoretical Context

The analysis of Eric's experience is rooted in the following definition of presence:

> *a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 266).*

Rodgers and I suggest that the key dimensions of presence include a unified teaching self, authentic relationships between teachers and students, a strong command of subject matter, and a healthy responsive context. Offering a complementary perspective, Way and Chu (2009) argue that "presence in relationship expand[s] upon the construct of voice or genuine expression and reflect[s] in addition the extent to which individuals feel connected to self and to others, and confident in their interpersonal relationships" (p. 56).

As these constructs of presence suggest, a central aspect of presence in teaching involves teachers' presence to self. Yet becoming present to self can be a complex process, especially when life in the classroom can provoke a teacher to disconnect from self – for fear of emotions such as anger, shame, or disappointment (Raider-Roth, 2003). Additionally, like all humans, teachers carry relational images from past relationships and culturally pervasive assumptions that can shape their current interactions (Gilligan, 1982/1993; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Reichert & Hawley, 2014). This is one form of the psychotherapeutic notion of transference (Hannifin & Apple, 2000). Teachers may unconsciously invoke relational dynamics that stem from old wounds, loves, and needs into current relationships (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). Understanding that the relational images we carry – whether from our past or from our cultural socialization – can shape our current teaching/learning relationships, requires us to become aware of the personal, psychological, and cultural forces that shape our work. Without such self-awareness, our capacity to be present is diminished.

Also informing this inquiry is research that focused on teachers' relational understandings of their adolescent girl students. In Brown & Gilligan's (1992) research on adolescent girls' development at the Laurel School in Cleveland, teachers explored the question, "What does it mean to be a woman teaching girls?" (Gilligan, 2011, p. 155). Like Eric, the women teachers were "faced with intricate dilemmas of relationship" (p. 158). A breakthrough in understanding these dilemmas occurred when teachers were "remembering their own adolescence and recalling their own experiences of disconnection or dissociation at this time" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 224). To reconnect with the girl or boy self of the teacher is to remember how coming of age in our culture is nourished and complicated by the society with which we interact. Just as the Laurel teachers remembered their own adolescence as a time of girls' relational loss, Eric confronts his own world of early childhood, a time we now understand where boys also struggle with connection and loss (Gilligan, 2003; Chu, 2014).

The portrait of Eric's experience with TJ – a child who reminds Eric so much of himself – expands our relational-cultural understandings of presence by examining the ways that cultural constructions of gender shape a teacher's capacity to be present to his students and their learning.

Methodology

Eric, a European-American kindergarten teacher, was one of eleven Pre-K-12 teachers from the mid-Hudson Valley and upstate New York regions who participated in a Teaching Boys Study Group, a teacher-research group dedicated to the study of teachers, boys and relationship.(1)

The group also included a college instructor, a research assistant, and myself as facilitator. Of the fourteen group members, two were male and twelve were female; one was Asian-American and thirteen were European-American. The teachers came from independent and public schools (urban, rural and suburban) and taught mainstream, special education, and gifted/talented students. The group met once a month during an academic year for three hours. It culminated in a two-day summer retreat.

The group employed two kinds of processes to investigate their relationships with boys in their classrooms. The first process was that of Descriptive Review (Himley & Carini, 2000), which asked the teachers to closely observe one boy during the year and then offer a detailed description of his physical stance and gesture, disposition and temperament, interests, connections with others, and modes of thinking and learning. These descriptions were offered in the full group setting through a structured process, eliciting from the larger group clarifying questions and suggestions for supporting the teacher's practice and the boys' learning.(2) This process was used to support the teachers in viewing and re-viewing a boy in their class, so as to see him in as multi-dimensional and complex a way as possible, and diminish the inclination to stereotype, generalize or otherwise obscure their vision of the individual boy learner. During the retreat the group analyzed the Descriptive Review transcripts, looked for prevailing themes and implications for action.

The second process was that of Associative Processes (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Harris, 1988) which asked the teachers to locate their own connections, associations, and responses to the boys they teach, in order to locate the ways that their own selves, gender identity, histories, values, and pedagogies shaped their relationships. Through free writing, open discussions, small group and paired conversations, these processes invited teachers to view the cultural pressures exerted on both themselves and the boys.

As a facilitator of this teacher research group, and a research partner with Eric, I became fascinated by his story and my own responses to Eric. With Eric's permission, I began an inquiry process to closely understand the tensions he articulated. This process was guided by two analytic approaches: the portraiture method (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), an ethnographic, aesthetic method that attends to a complex, multi-dimensional rendering of another person's experience; and the Listening Guide (Gilligan, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003), a voice-centered, psychological methodology that attends to the ways in which a person articulates his/her self in relation to the prevailing experiences, memories, narratives, and tensions that surface from the inquiry.

Introducing Eric

A veteran teacher of twenty-five years, Eric embodies the definition of master teacher. Committed to a child-centered, experience-based pedagogy, Eric is dedicated to eliciting the self-expression of each child and to constructing a community in which each child holds a vital space. He runs his kindergarten classroom with a "learning centers" approach, offering reading, writing,

mathematical, computer, artistic, and musical opportunities throughout the day. A teacher with guitar in hand, he regularly leads his class and the other kindergarten classes in song and builds a sense of group and voice for the children and teachers. Eric brings a rich teaching history to his current position, with experiences in both public and private schools, traditional settings and progressive ones, including a formative experience in a Waldorf School.

Eric held an unusual position in the Teaching Boys study group – as the only male early childhood teacher (and one of two men in the group), and one of two doctoral students. His position in the group became more distinctive when, during the third year of the project, he decided to join a research group I convened, which conducted a secondary analysis of the data. In this interpretive community (Tappan, 2001), he held an insider/outsider position.

Eric was deliberate and intentional about choosing to observe TJ, a five-year-old European American boy. In a reflective essay written during the study group year, he explained that he chose TJ because TJ "was already, at that early part of the year, challenging my authority, making life difficult for his classmates, and was engendering in me feelings of anger and frustration." Eric's intentions for the study were clear. He wrote that he had "two distinct though interrelated focuses." Not only did he want to understand the boy more clearly, he "was determined to explore my own emotional responses to this child in order to inform my own inner work for the good of the hundreds of children that I will help educate during the rest of my career." Eric perceived a "mismatch" between TJ and his classroom and was determined to try to understand the ensuing dynamics.

Early on, Eric recognized that he was "drawn to 'naughty' children" and he wondered if his personal experience shaped this attraction. "I was every teacher's nightmare from kindergarten on, with few exceptions. It was those exceptions, two years where I felt 'seen' and 'heard' that have helped to give form and meaning to my teaching." While Eric wrote these sentences in the first year of the project, his own experience as a student was initially unexplored. Coming across most clearly in his rationale for choosing TJ was Eric's commitment to being present to his students' learning and the centrality of seeing and hearing his students. He understood that he was not always present with TJ, and that his own emotional turmoil with this boy was a significant factor in preventing a present stance.

Describing TJ

In the winter, assisted by two colleagues from the group who served as the "chairs" of his session, Eric launched an ambitious Descriptive Review of TJ. Not only did he want to describe TJ fully, he also wanted to describe his own experience of using Descriptive Process to understand TJ.

In the first part of the Descriptive Review, Eric described TJ as having a "passionate nature," "impatience," and a "lack of impulse control," which made "him into a highly visible child in

this class of twenty-one children." TJ often entered the classroom dramatically and made "his presence known "in one of a variety of ways":

> *He can burst through the door in a fit of hysteria, and he can be yelling out something about his "stupid mommy" not giving him the snack that he wanted or some such thing. Or his backpack did something that he didn't want it to do and he's cursing at it and throwing it down on the floor. Or he can slink through the door as though he had the weight of the world upon his shoulders. Or he can walk in as the happiest child you have ever seen in your life, bubbling, enthusiastic, with stories to tell. Whatever TJ is feeling is highly visible.*

Eric described TJ as an expressive and dramatic child who acted out and told stories, painted, and sang. He was a child who made connections with ease, linking new experiences with memories, bringing "divergent elements together in remarkable ways."

TJ engaged in complicated relationships with his classmates. Eric observed that TJ "has a way of stepping into the personal space of other children, touches them and their possessions as well without warning. Many children are very taken aback by this behavior as you can imagine, especially kindergarten children." Eric's relationship with TJ was complicated. One the one hand, TJ was clearly attached to Eric, as evidenced by his vocal expressions of love for Eric. Eric recounted how TJ would

> *hug my leg and, and uh, and call out in a loud voice how much he loves me. Um, this can happen in the middle of reading a story, it can happen while we're reciting a poem and again, TJ's got this voice that's, it's expressive and loud and when he tells me he loves me it's been broadcast all over the room.*

On the other hand, TJ challenged Eric's classroom rules and norms for behavior. When Eric sang with the group, he recounted:

> *if TJ happens to notice that ah, that I sing a word wrong or I leave a word out, um, he'll, he'll start just yelling out at the top of his lungs that, "that's not the way the song goes" and he may stand up and sing the song totally somehow able to screen out the fact, my singing. I mean if you've ever tried to sing a different song while somebody's singing [laughter] a song it's not an easy thing to do. But he belts out the right way to do the song even though he's in a different part of the song than I am. [laughter] It's an extraordinary thing.*

When Eric retold this story during a debriefing interview, he expressed "awe" for TJ's capacity to put himself in front of the group in such a confident manner.

Obstacles to Presence

As Eric described TJ with generosity and loving detail, he also described his intense struggle to become present to TJ's learning and to connect fully with TJ as a boy in school. Eric identified three impediments to his capacity to be present.

A Divided Self

The issue that made TJ so compelling for Eric was the very strong negative emotions that he called up in Eric. As we listened to Eric describe these emotions we could hear how they led to a strong disconnection with himself and with TJ. Eric described TJ as:

> *a child who defied my years of competence as an educator, engendering all kinds of feelings in me... TJ has put me through an emotional wringer... How do you deal with those antipathies especially? I mean there's, there are things in TJ that piss me off, they really piss me off.*

In a reflective essay, Eric articulately described the feelings of shame that accompanied his anger and feelings of incompetence in his work with TJ:

> *There is an element of shame for me as I confront my ability to fully bring this child into the "fold" of the class.... The educational establishment and my peers see me as a highly competent and gifted educator. They have no idea! I see that I can't reach this child, I can't nurture this child, I can't provide the structure that this one needs, I can't figure out this other child. What they see is an illusion that I provide for the rest of the world. I see the real me and the real me is tremendously flawed and inadequate.*

As Hargreaves (1998) argues (citing Scheff 1990, 1994a,b) in his study of emotions and teachers, the feeling of shame in teaching is particularly painful, because in falling "morally short of our own or others' moral standards in a fundamental way … we feel our integrity and our selves have been placed in question" (p. 840). Zembylas (2003) adds that shame

> *has been a profound affective attunement in teachers' careers because teachers are constantly exposed as having some kind of flaws.... What are perceived as their deficiencies are paraded, and an internalized audience with the capacity to judge them is created. (p. 228)*

How did the anger and shame that Eric articulates shape his ability to be present with TJ? Zembylas (2003) argues that shame leads teachers to "hide," feel unable to "get away," and experience "silence and isolation" (p. 228). Eric was keenly aware that "other than my own reflective work, there is no venue within my profession that allows for airing these feelings and sharing weaknesses and anxieties on my part." Eric believed that these feelings kept him one step removed from TJ and one step removed from himself:

> *Certainly my reactions to TJ made me unhappy with my own responses, unhappy with whom I had become in my interactions with this little boy. I needed to repair not only my relationship to TJ, but also my relationship with my own self and my own personal values.*

In listening to Eric, we can hear the voice of a "divided self," a teaching self that is yearning for its wholeness between belief and action (Dewey, 1938; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). We can hear how the divided self is an obstacle to Eric's capacity to be present with TJ.

Feeling Unseen

A second obstacle to Eric's capacity to be present to TJ was Eric's strong sense that the depth and intensity of the negative emotion he held for TJ was not visible to his study group colleagues. One way Eric expressed this invisibility concerned his frustration with the Descriptive Process. He felt it constrained him in unnatural ways, and did not allow him to attend to the wellspring of emotion that surged for him in regard to TJ. As the facilitator of the group, I believed the process invited this very kind of self-reflection in the preparation of the review, and especially in the relationship with the chairs. Eric, however, did not feel that his needs were being met. Eric also felt that the review framework did not allow him to explore his relationship with TJ. My perspective differed and I believed that there was ample opportunity. In the Descriptive Review itself, the section called "connections with others" invited such description. Additionally, the group had decided to create an intentional space in the review to attend specifically to the dynamics of relationship between the teacher and the boy. We left it up to the chair and the presenting teacher to decide how to incorporate this into each review. Eric felt, however, that these opportunities were not sufficient. In consultation with his chairs, Eric decided to add a section at the end of the review to describe his own emotional stance and his feelings about the Descriptive Process.

As I observed Eric in this struggle and attempted to assist him with the difficulties he was experiencing, I found myself annoyed by his resistance. Eric already had experience of the Descriptive Process from his doctoral course work. It seemed to me that he had known what the experience would be like. So why, I wondered, did he choose to participate in this group and then resist it with such intensity? My margin notes to him on his writing reflect our struggle. In one instance, I ask him to try to play the "believing game" (quoting an essay by Peter Elbow, 1973) and suspend disbelief in order to see what possibilities for learning were open to him.

The longer our struggle ensued, the more confused I was by it. I began to wonder if we were engaged in a parallel process of sorts. That is, were we engaged in a struggle that resembled Eric's struggle with TJ? What could I learn from what appeared to be a reenactment of resistance? As the group began to plan our retreat, and we struggled with the ways we were talking about boys and gender, there seemed to be a collective dissociation of sorts. We were having difficulty articulating our understandings of the boys we had described in such depth. Now, Eric's questions began to ring loud. I became embarrassed by my resistance to Eric because what I came to understand from the group was the need to attend to our own responses to this powerful set of descriptions of boys. This parallel process of reenactment allowed me to feel something akin to what Eric experienced with TJ, helping me understand Eric's (and other teachers') needs. My journal from May of that year reflected this turn in my thinking: "We have spent a lot of time looking at the boys, and very little time looking at us. This is what Eric has said all along. I need to listen to this carefully." Rereading his description, I was able to finally take in his message. Together with two members in the group, we crafted a set of experiences that attended to the teachers' emotions and reactions which were evoked by their close attention to these boys (such as associative writing exercises, and hiking and talking about their responses to the Descriptive Reviews).

As the teachers came to see the boys more clearly, and became more present to them, they needed others to become present to their own experiences of teaching, gender, and relationship. They needed to feel seen, especially the complex set of emotions that surfaced in this inquiry. This finding resonates with prior research that investigated how school context and the connection with other faculty supported the capacity to be present (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006; Stieha & Raider-Roth, 2012). Eric's resistance to the Descriptive Review process was a strong message that in order for him to be present to a boy who "pushed his buttons," he needed others to be present to his own emotional turmoil provoked by TJ and their relationship. Eric's message also taught me that teachers' presence to boys required a strong connection to self, and that to have a connection to self, teachers needed to feel seen by caring and compassionate colleagues.

Resisting Gender

A third impediment to Eric's ability to be present to TJ concerned his struggle to recognize the ways that issues of gender shaped his students. As a participant in the Study Group, Eric wrestled with suggestions to look at the children in his class as gendered cohorts. In response to one study group session Eric wrote,

> *I find it so challenging to look at gender issues in kindergarteners. I make an attempt to level the playing field and think in non-gendered ways. Discussing differences makes me uncomfortable in some ways because it makes me suddenly look for differences.*

Eric yearned for an openness in his view of young children and did not want assumptions or stereotyped images to cloud how he looked and interacted with his students. In reflecting on his own classroom at the close of the Study Group year, Eric wrote, "In terms of gender, it is made clear from the outset that we are all children in this classroom, equal in all ways. I reject any notion of 'the boys' or 'the girls.' We are 'the children.'"

What was the impact of Eric rejecting gender difference on his relationship with TJ? Three years later, as a member of the research group, Eric examined his relationship with TJ, using his own writing about TJ over the course of the project as data. In a final paper Eric wrote:

> *My resistance to 'seeing the boy' is clear in my responses to many of the readings from the Teaching Boys group... In revisiting my journal entries about these writings, I universally rejected the notions that are often put forth that attribute behavioral characteristics to one gender or another... [I began to wonder,] have my own experiences put me into a mindset that will not allow me to see boys as boys?... Looking at [my] responses and precepts through the lens of a researcher causes me to question whether such notions have caused me to not see what is before me.*

While Eric had assumed a teacher-researcher stance in the Study Group, taking an insider-outsider perspective in the subsequent research group afforded him a new understanding of gender as he recognized the power TJ wielded over him. Somehow, this small person was "causing me to ask whether I was maintaining my ideals as a teacher, whether my methods had become outdated, whether or not I had turned my back on this child." As Eric questioned how TJ held so much power, he discovered that "I don't yet know this boy. I don't yet know how to give him what he needs. Nor am I able to figure out what he really needs."

Eric discovered that his view of TJ was reactive and that his efforts to "contain" TJ so that he did not "affect the class in some negative way that I can't get them back together again" did not reflect his fundamental values as a teacher: "My sense of my teaching is based on hearing my children, connecting with them and finding ways to help them grow." Eric wanted to be present to students, and yet he could not assume this stance with TJ, and he perceived TJ as holding the power to prevent connection.

In trying to understand how this tension developed, Eric wondered if he had "inadvertently put myself out of relationship with this child in order to further my goal to have him behave in acceptable ways." While Eric did not apply a gender lens to explain his actions, his comment begs the question of what defines "acceptable ways." Was Eric trying to make TJ be a "good boy"? And what does a "good boy" look like? The question of acceptable behavior became the lynchpin to understanding how gender was shaping Eric's capacity to see himself and TJ, and Eric began to look carefully at his own experience as a boy in school.

In an articulate and moving essay, Eric described himself as a wiggly, smart, impulsive boy, who often could not contain his enthusiasm and who provoked punitive, angry teachers. He recalled his interactions with Mrs. A, his second grade teacher, who made him sit under tables when he broke rules, and who placed him in the corner of the room to write out "I will not speak in class" fifty times. Eric described his resistance as with rich clarity:

> *After she stormed away to resume her work with the rest of the class I wrote the words on the first line and then carefully placed ditto marks on the next forty-nine lines beneath each words. When Mrs. A saw my papers complete with ditto marks she was furious – though she was usually furious when she directed her attention towards me. She tore up the papers and told me, "You will now write the same sentence one hundred times WITHOUT ditto marks." I did so ... on the wall next to my little desk. The next thing I knew I was in the school's office looking up at the high counter (over which I could not yet see), waiting for the principal to come and talk with me.*

Eric's resistance to the punishment, to the edict of silence, was clear. And he embraced teachers who released him from the classroom corners. These compassionate and connected teachers shaped Eric's passion to teach:

> *Prepared for the worst as I entered third grade, I was amazed to see a smile on my new teacher's face as she asked me what I would like her to call me. I answered with my nickname, Ricky, which was the name used only by my friends and relatives. "Hello Ricky, she responded, "Welcome to third grade." I felt like I had gone to heaven. Mrs. H, my third grade teacher, seemed to welcome everything that I had to say. She often took me aside to ask me how I was doing. I remember thinking that this was the first person in school who had ever listened to me or cared to ask questions about who or how I was.*

As Eric recalled the stories of his own boyhood in school, he began to see the evolution of his own gender identity. In recognizing his childhood suffering, he wondered:

> *Was I placing TJ into such a paradoxical situation? I was asking TJ to be able to sit still, to be quiet (or at least quieter). Was I seeing myself in the mirror of this young, noisy, impulsive, spontaneous little boy? His life in the classroom was, in many ways a parallel life to my own in my early years. Was I seeing him as a boy or was I incapable of confronting the boy TJ and forming a relationship with him? ... Was I becoming one of my early teachers and squashing this little boy's independence for the sake of maintaining control*

over the classroom? Was this the threat that I had posed for my teachers as a young boy?

In this incisive reflection, Eric actively examined how his own expectations of masculinity were shaping his behavior and teaching practices. Moreover, he was asking if his expectations of appropriate boy behavior were clouding his capacity to form a relationship with TJ. As Eric became present to the forces of gender that shaped him as a man and teacher and that were also shaping TJ, he began to forge an identification with TJ. In recognizing his own expectations for TJ's behavior, Eric came to see his own trajectory of boyhood as well as his adult definitions and performances of masculinity. With this vision, or presence to self and culture, he was then able to become present to TJ and the forces of gender and culture that were exerting themselves on this small boy.

Presence in Relationship

As I reflect on Eric's journey through the Teaching Boys Study Group, the subsequent research group, his relationship with TJ, and his relationship with his own teaching and gender identity, I am struck by his deep intellectual and emotional work. What is most striking is the disconnect between Eric's beliefs about presence and his experience with TJ.

Eric has the disposition and experience of a teacher who knows how to be present with his students. This stance is a cornerstone of his teaching identity – it is conscious and intentional. Not surprisingly, what led him to fundamentally question his own capacities as a teacher was a boy with whom he could not be present. He found himself in a state of disconnection, a state of being out of relationship with TJ and detached from himself. He experienced anger, shame, and guilt in response to this disconnected state. He could not see TJ and TJ could not see him and there was little trust, intersubjectivity, or mutuality – all necessary components of presence (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006).

For Eric to become present to TJ, he required opportunities to reconnect with his own teaching self, beliefs, and values. Becoming present also meant becoming conscious of his own history, definitions, and constructions of gender as a boy, man, and teacher. In so doing, he began to see TJ and the myriad forces with which TJ wrestled more completely. Being able to see himself as a boy, and to see TJ as a boy were central paving stones on the road to presence.

Eric also urgently wanted to have colleagues who could become present to his own struggle – who could see him in all his distress, identify with the struggle, and help him build a road back to a more connected sense of self as a teacher. This kind of learning community, built on mutuality, trust, and shared inquiry was a cornerstone to becoming "vitally present" (Cuffaro, 1995). Quoting Dewey, Cuffaro teaches us that community requires a genuine form of communication, one that is "a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession" (Dewey, 1966, p. 9, in Cuffaro, 2000, p. 8). Unpacking Dewey's meaning Cuffaro explains, "It is in discussion, in

conversation, in the exchange of ideas, in the sharing of our thoughts and feelings, that community achieves its strength and meaning" (p. 8). Cuffaro helps us understand that it is in community, where we can bring our wholeness as human beings – where we can share all our thoughts, ideas, and feelings – that our capacity to be present to ourselves and our students is cultivated. Becoming present to self, our students, and the cultural forces that influence our identities and relationships requires intensive reflective and intellectual energy, and a community that can nourish and sustain this crucial work of teachers.

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